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ABSTRACT

Social studies instruction will improve if educators understand and integrate information gained from pragmatics into social studies curriculum and methods. Pragmatics is an area of linguistic study based on the philosophy of pragmatism which emphasizes social consequences of events and actions. Pragmatics deals particularly with the relationships between words or expressions and the way in which people use them. Review of social studies content and methods reveals a strong reliance on the medium of language. For example, the anthropology curriculum stresses cultural concepts which are closely related to language concepts. Also, career education involves study of the functional uses of language in job interviews and in employee relationships. Social studies classroom teachers will increase student involvement in active learning if they encourage discourse conversation in the classroom. Other activities which encourage understanding of meaning through language include role playing, categorizing and describing imaginary situations, interviewing community members to find about family and local history, and class discussion. (MR)

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TITLE - PRAGMATICS: THE SOCIAL FUNCTIONS OF LANGUAGE -IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES

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Introduction

This paper explores the notion that the area of linguistic study known as Pragmatics has both curricular and methodological importance for social studies education. The author suggests that the most significant among the implications of research and theory from this field is the need for a closer relationship between the language learning experiences and social development program structured for children and adolescents in the schools. It is not the author's intent to argue this thesis, but rather to develop some ideas based on its assumption.

The paper is divided into two major parts:

Part I: An Overview of selected aspects of Pragmatics which relate to social studies education.

Part II: A Brief look at some curricular and methodological opportunties and ideas afforded by Pragmatics.

Part I - An Overview of Pragmatics

Pragmatics: Some Definitions and Conceptual ties

Pragmatics is a term which has both linguistic and philosophical roots and meanings. A vague linguistic definition of pragmatics might be the study of relationships between signs and sign users. (VanDyk, 1976, P. 26). Removing the linguistic terminology, pragmatics, by this definition is the study of words or expressions and how people use them. Some amplification of this definition was provided by Heinig (1977) who described pragmatics as the study of functional communication or of the social uses humans have for communication.

Pragmatics is an integral and essential aspect of linguistic science. Bates (1976) suggested that historically that science could be divided into divisions of: (1) syntactics or the relationships holding among the signs themselves; (2) semantics or the relationship between signs and their referents; and (3) pragmatics or the connections between signs and their human users. The key concern of pragmatics is meaning, not meaning of specific words or phrases, but the meaning of messages communicated through words, inferences drawn from them the way they are grouped, the expression with which they are uttered, and the previously existing relationships between speaker and listener.

There is a close tie between pragmatics and psycholinguistics which is concerned with the relationships between thinking and language. Linguist Naom Chomsky was typical of linguists in their concern over the social and intellective importance of language in his statement that:

> *"...language is a specific human possession, and even at low levels of intelligence, at pathological levels, we find a command of language that is totally unattainable by an ape that may, in other respects, surpass a human imbecile in problem solving ability and adaptive behavior." (Chomsky, 1968, p. 9)*

That very exclusiveness in the possession of language for human beings invites the study of the "tool" quality of that language. The intellective and social uses of language are both acquired as part of the enculturation process. Flavell (1977) posited that the child simultaneously learns both language itself and how to use it in the course of language development. Language uses are of two types: (1) private - cognitive, or the use of language as any sort of aid to ones own thinking remembering, etc. and (2) social-communicative or the use of language in interpersonal situations to send and receive messages.

Pragmatics as a way of viewing social communication has its foundations philosophy known as pragmatism. The essence of pragmatism is its emphasis the social consequences or effects of any event or action. The pragmatic method as described by philosopher William James in Pragmatism A new Name for an Old Way of Thinking "is to try to interpret each notion by its respective practical consequences." (James, 1913, p.45) James went on in this essay to say that to attain clarity of thoughts regarding any "object" the need is only to consider the possible practical effects and sensations might be expected from the object. If "object" in this statement is translated to refer to "action " and if speech is considered an action, then the connection to pragmatic aspects of language study is clear.

The direct philosophical antecedents of pragmatics, though, are to be found in the works of philosophers whose central concern has been language and meaning. Those linguistic writers who attempt to build a comprehensive

View of pragmatics most often refer to Wittgenstein (Philosophical Investigations, 1958, The Blue and Brown Books, 1969) and Austin (Philosophical Papers, 1961). Though neither philosopher uses the term pragmatics both provide precepts and assumptions upon which the study is based. For example, Wittgenstein (1958, p. 151) posited that, "Language is an instrument. Its concepts are instruments." He argued that we may do various things with the same sentence to give it various meanings.

Austin (1961)isa much more abstract linguistic philosopher he said, that words have meanings but derive their meaning from the sentences in which they are used. Austin further described the importance of word context and principles of meaning implicit within context to the ability of a speaker to say meaningful things. Austin discribed a satisfactory utterance as one which required the presence of a conventional link between the words and the referents they named and a natural link between the type of utterance and "sense".

How do Humans Use Language in Social Relationships

Pragmatic linguists are first of all concerned with the internal intellective and motivating structure of functional communication. Bates (1976), has suggested that communication is a complex social process which consists of a series of four pragmatic structures or speech acts. The first of these to occur is always the goal of a speaker. The speaker of a sentence wishes to create in a listener a set of mental act or operations. Other speech acts are locution or the acts, physical or mental that are required to create speech, illocutionary,or conventional social speech acts recognized as such

by both the speaker and the listener, and perlocutionary acts or the created effects, whether planned or not, of a particular sentence used in speech. As these processes occur, semantic questions of meaning enter into pragmatic consideration. There are themselves complex. Few if any expressions can be said to have a single meaning. Carroll (1964, pp.40-42), has suggested that issues related to assignment of meaning include: (1) denotative meaning; (2) connotative meaning; (3) meaningfulness; (4) situational meaning; and (5) intention versus meaning clarification. Carroll's references need some explanation. Denotative and connatative meanings are inherent to the language itself and the culture. Meaningfulness refers to the personal impact on the individual speaker or listener, and of a particular speech act. meaning involves the specific contributions of time and place factors to the total meaning of a speech act. The final of Carroll's issues, intention versus meaning, involves the differences between the speaker's purposes, goals, and thoughts and the meanings of the consequent speech act. A sixth issue, contextual meaning, might also be included, referring to the influence on a particular speech of previous and subsequent speech acts. All of these language meaning issues are to some degree social in nature and represent concerns for the social studies.

How Do Humans Use Language?

The purposes of language use are diverse and complex. Simply listing the variety of uses and the variety of manipulations involved by both speaker

and listener would be a difficult and endless task. Wittgenstein (1958) noted the following examples as indicative of the multiplicity of language uses:

> *Giving orders and obeying them.*
> *Describing the appearance of an object of giving its measurements.*
> *Construction of an object from a description (or drawing).*
> *Reporting an event.*
> *Speculating about an event.*
> *Forming and testing a hypothesis.*
> *Presenting the results of an experiemnt in tables and diagrams.*
> *Making up a story; and reading it.*
> *Play acting.*
> *Singing.*
> *Guessing riddles.*
> *Making a joke; telling it.*
> *Solving a problem in practical arithmetic.*
> *Translating from one language into another.*
> *Asking, thinking, cursing, greeting, praying.*

If it is first considered that these are merely examples, the infinite variety within each type of activity stands out. Chomsky (1968, p. 10), pointed out that normal use of language involves an infinite number of possible sentences which can be used and understood with no strangeness or difficulty for either speaker or listener. To this extend at least the normal constant uses of language are creative and innovative processes.

For purposes of study, at least, it is necessary to invent a set of categories into which speech acts can be grouped. Linguists are often satisfied to categorize the functions of speech acts in terms of the performatives or content of the sentences used, the presuppositions or assumption about context that make a sentence verifiable, and conversational postulates or particular presuppositions related to a particular dialogue and its participants.

Social scientists need a system based on the social functions themselves. The following headings are suggested as major categories for most uses of languages.

1. Controlling

The speaker is in control of the situation. He or she may be asserting authority, commanding, threatening or offering. If not in actuality at least by intention the speaker assumes the authority and right to act. By way of analogy to research, the speaker is the independent variable while the listener(s) is/are dependent variables.

2. Seeking

The speaker may be trying to convince , persuade, argue, request, plead or beg. The listener(s) is/are in actual control in the social exchange. The speaker is attempting to have some request or ways granted which the listener or listener has power to grant.

3. Informing

The speaker acts as the authority and possessor of information. The speakers role is expository and active while the listener's is passive. Theoretically the speaker has information which the listener wants or needs. The speaker informs, demonstrates, explains, describes, elaborates, outlines, gives directions (*Note overlaps with controlling role), or entertains the listener, is involved only as to the extend to comprehension and the attitude of concentration.

4. Questioning

The speaker is probing for specific information, seeking clarification, explaining, probing, problem solving, critically examining, analyzing etc. The listener is preparing to respond either with an informing strategy.

5. Ritualizing

Many forms of communication are part of the communication rituals of a culture. Different types of greetings ("Hello," "How are you?" "Good Bye" are typical of such.) These show such qualities as deferrence to status yet reflect fairly sterotyped language to serve particular social functions. Ritualized communication is any which follows in fairly regular pattern the functions of which are much the same throughout a culture.

6. Imagining

The speaker uses languages to dream fantasize, speculate, etc. In essence every role play use of communication where the individual speaker makes use of another personality than his or her own an imagining form.

7. Feeling

The speaker expresses or tries to communicate emotions, beliefs, etc. The speaker may be simply letting the listener know how he or she feels or may be directing the feeling, whether anger, love, hate,

concern, interest, et., toward the listener.

The categories described above might be termed as families of strategies for using language. Culture influences, often dictates, how humans use language, Zintz (1977) put it very well when he said that, "Man has poured what he knows into language, but it has frozen around him. One's real world is built unconciously by the language of the parent group." Using language is never independent of meaning. Like learning to play chess one ceases to learn to use language more effectively.

Part II: Curricular Implication of Pragmatics for the Social Studies

The theme of the May 1977 issue of Social Education was, "Verbal Impact: Words as Reflections of Society." In it author James Michener commented that the adventures and events " of history did not happen until they were crystalized into words and comprehensions." (Michener, 1977, p. 377) It is this impact of language upon events and human relationships that makes pragmatics the concern of the social studies.

As the theme of that Journal issue asserts, words and the ways in which they are used do mirror the culture, the times, and the conditions of any group of people living. They transmit the values of group and individual alike. Words are not just among the tools; they are the principal tools of human rleationships. As such their place in the content and strategies of social studies needs to be analyzed and critically examined.

This paper makes no claim that pragmatics offers major new directions for social studies curricula or that it provides a far reaching answer to the critical and controversial issues and questions facing social studies education. However, pragmatics as a study may provide new ways of looking at and even of legitimatizing some of the content of current and future social studies programs.

Pragmatics may be an encompassing concept for many of the concerns and issues that have been "new directions" for social studies content in recent years. Among the articles appearing in the "Verbal Impact" issue of Social Education was one in which Matthews (1977) presented a summary list of sexist vocabulary and some explanations of how this list evolved. Questions related to sex roles, sexism and to the values and views related to sex roles often tend to be language related. In another article in the same issue Mehaffy and Sitton, 1977) dealt with oral history an area of inquiry oriented exploration which has in its basis language used to preserve and

and transmit tradition, values and heritage. Still another of the presentations in this Journal issue described use of primary resources for studying local ethnic groups (McClain and Clegg, 1977). Emphasis was given to words and records that might be analyzed. Both local study and the concern for ethnic cultures have a deeply engrained concern for and analyses of many of the ways in which language is used.

Many of the curricular content areas which had, until recently, low impact but may have a growing place in social studies curricula, have special interest in the functions of language. For example, much of what the social studies is concerned with in career education has to do with the functional use of language in situations which are generalizable to various career roles. Typical of its content are job application and interviews, worker relationship problems, employee-employer relationships, job satisfiers, career planning etc. Popular study culture, with its examination of music, mass media, slang and jargon, personalities, and similar concerns, likewise often focuses on the uses of language. Propaganda and advertizing as areas of study focus, almost to the exclusion of all other factors, upon the manipulation of people through communication processes.

Pragmatics as a discipline provides a process of studying culture which has something to offer to inquiry oriented programs. Since such programs have some concern for systematic series of steps in solving problems, pragmatics offers special perspectives on problems involving social communication. Pragmatics is a linguistic study and thus an important facet of the social science of anthropology. Where curricula are structured to develop social science concepts and skills of social sciencing, its approach is significant. In fact, the importance of language and its uses to culture suggested the introduction to this section make that study integral, almost focal to the social sciences. To neglect

such study seems almost to ignore the essence of culture and history alike.

But if the field of pragmatics has an inherent position in curricular content in contemporary social studies, it is as much a part its strategies and techniques. Concern for student participation and involvement in active as opposed to postive learning have increased the oral interaction of students in social studies classes. Techniques involved in dealing with moral dilemmas, values clarification, problem solving and inquiry include strong emphasis on verbal interaction as intrinsic to the method of teaching. Social studies teaching which utilizes such strategies as group activities, discussion and questioning, pupil teacher planning, and role play and creative drama are by their very nature part of pragmatics.

According to Flavell (1976, p. 174-5), language research shows an increase with age of such pragmatic abilities as (1) sensitivity to words themselves, the concepts they identify and to things the listener might confuse with these; (2) sensitivity to the listener and his/her communication situation; (3) sensitivity to the feedback from the listener which shows attention and understanding; and (4) ability in listening to be aware of possible meanings, ambiguities and the process of clarifying. Development of these and other language use competencies seems most appropriate for social studies.

Most of all perhaps, pragmatics is closely related to the techniques used in simulation gaming. Simulations almost exclusively involve models of the real world and problem situations in which "tool" utilization of language is essential for decision making.

A Final Statement

Involvement oriented social studies programs and teaching require students to participate in a spectrum of researches and problems of human interaction. That interaction is chiefly through language. These involvement programs themselves include discussion and group interaction in a variety of ways. Pragmatics or the study of the relationships between words and the humans that use them, seems to offer opportunities and approaches to meeting the needs of such programs. For more effective participation by students in their social studies learning, for the development of social skills, and as a field of study pragmatics needs to be given a careful look in planning social studies programs.

Pragmatics represents more for the social studies than just another schism of a social science discipline. To this writer, at least, it is an exciting, perspective which brings closer unity among programs focused on personal development, life roles, problem solving, and conceptual development and between the social studies and the language arts.

Pragmatic Listing Activities

Listing Activity: Conversations at Dinner

Pretend

You have the opportunity to plan a dinner party and to (successfully) invite the ten most interesting conversationalists in the world. What living people would you invite?

If you could call upon individuals no longer living who would you invite?

If you could only invite women, who would you invite?

If you could only invite women who would you invite ? If you wanted too. discuss only one particular issue or problem area (such as one of the following types) who would you invite? Examples of Problem areas:

(a) The Equal Rights Amendment

(b) Winning at sports

(c) Getting a job

(d) Getting your own business started

(e) Succeeding in show business

(f) Overcoming failure

(g) Preventing burglary

(h) Preventing crimes "against person"

(i) Relaxing when you're tense

(k) Being Creative

Listing Activity 2: High and Low Glamor

1. What are ten high "glamour" jobs that you might aspire to?
2. What are ten low "glamour" jobs you could do for a career (not just a short term job)?
3. For five "jobs" in each category list the human situationships qualifications needed.

Listing Activity 3:

The central staircase of the main library at the University of Tennessee has a high vaulted medieval ceiling. This ceiling is divided into twenty sections by cathedral like arches. In the center of each ceiling section in large gothic letters are the names of twenty individuals. All are male. Each of them is recognizable by his last name and only that name is given. All have contributed to the arts, humanities, or sciences. All are European by birth or ancestory. They span twenty-five centuries, but no one is included from the 20th century.

1. What people would you expect to be named and known by their last name? (Who is the <u>one</u> for whom both names are given?)
2. If only women's names were featured who would you expect to be listed?
3. If only people of non-European ancestory then who?

4. If only 20th century figures then who?

Discussion: What force do famous names themselves carry in language?

"Pragmatic" Activities:

Using the Tape Recorder for Oral History

Assignments to students:

1. Do a biographical interview with an older person (let the teacher review interview questions in writing before you interview. Share the tape.
2. Do a family history based on family interviews.
3. Do a personal autobiography in tape.
4. Do an "on the spot" interview series of passers by or vistors do a historic site in the country.
5. Do an interview with someone who has been present at a historic moment.
6. Do "after the fact" interviews of and about living people who have participated in prominent events.
7. Pair off with another student and alternate interviewing each other about local events of the past.

Advantages of Oral History as a Classroom Tool

1. Involves students actively.

2. It can be "done" without elaborate resources.
3. Topics of local dimensions have importance and oral history emphasize these.
4. It generates enthusiusm.
5. Such projects are "real" and they get students to do something in an unique concrete way that they can take pride in.

"Pragmatic" Discussion follow-up to Oral History

1. How did you "break" into the interview? How did you end it?
2. What traits seemed to be part of the interviewers role? , the tole of the person being interviewed?
3. What difficulties did you have ib maintaining the "flow" of the interview.
4. Is it easier to interview or to be interviewed? What are the difficulties of each?
5. What wkills are needed for effective interviews?
6. Do you think it is easier or more difficult for someone to be interviewed by a student for a school activity than it would have had you represented the newspaper, radio or T.V.?

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